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# \* Theodore Parker

Samuel Johnson

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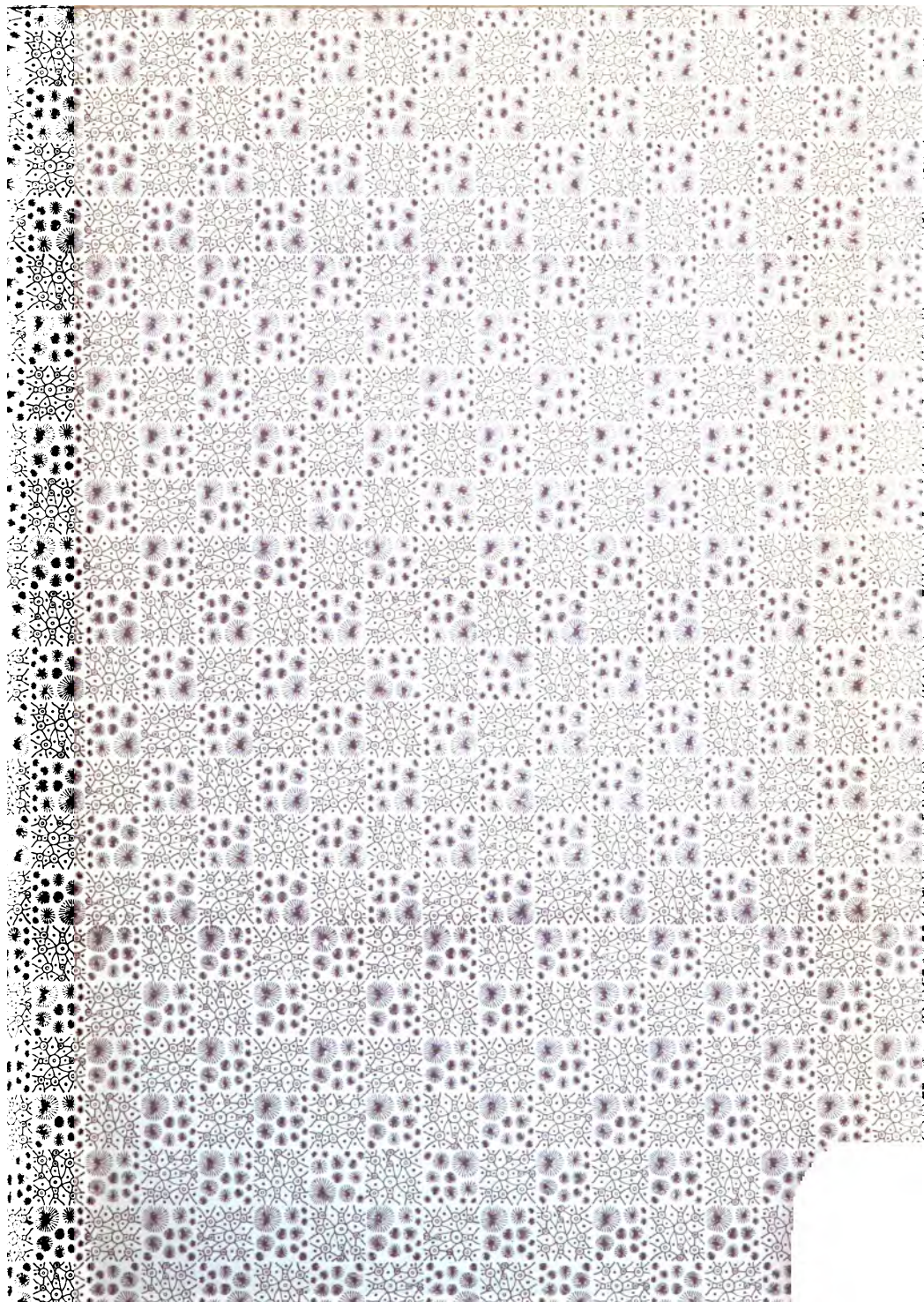
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9 January, 1892.











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THEODORE PARKER

A LECTURE

BY

SAMUEL JOHNSON

EDITED BY

JOHN H. CLIFFORD AND HORACE L. TRAUBEL

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c,  
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## NOTE OF EDITING

Those who know Mr. Johnson's great work, *Oriental Religions*, need not to be told of the thorough reach of his studies. *India, China, Persia*, a triad of Universal Religion, attest his spiritual genius. Their general title fails to indicate the scope of critical research which deals not only with the religion, but likewise with the history and civilization of great races.

The men and women who enjoyed Mr. Johnson's personal ministrations as a teacher of Religion in the widest range of thought and in the tenderest of private relations cherish his large discourse and his strengthening applications of spiritual philosophy to the common needs of life. Such a man was well fitted to be the interpreter of Theodore Parker. This little book is made up from four several writings of the Lecture, by careful collating of the manuscripts for their best result. Alterations and transpositions for full consecutive treatment do not, it is believed, in any case, violate Mr. Johnson's meaning.

This editing has been a glad labor of love. The editors have been much assisted by Mrs. Nora R. Baldwin and Miss Anne Montgomerie.

That which is placed as "Introductory Address" appears to have been a spontaneous ut-

terance upon the death of Theodore Parker in 1860. The Lecture was written from time to time, and delivered in different places, between that date and Mr. Johnson's own decease in 1882.

Here is the estimate of Theodore Parker left by a fellow worker in religion and life qualified to speak of that still unmeasured Prophet of the soul and of social reformation, for whom remains increasing reverence, as both gift and guide of America's noblest spirit, and permanence among the great teachers and friends of man.

There seems a timeliness in publishing this Lecture to-day, when "issues" among religious Liberals of various schools are much debated—"issues" which Parker anticipated with a reformer's foresight and courage, which Johnson likewise faced with equal candor and independence.

J. H. C.

GERMANTOWN, Philadelphia, Pa.

## INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

I feel that in the presence of such a public sorrow, and before the thought of what Theodore Parker has been and is yet to be to the cause of learning and piety and social progress and universal brotherhood, silence, for me at least, is best. In that special relation in which his peculiar genius placed him to his time, and the breaking of its bread of truth among the people, he has not left behind him the man competent to measure or to trace the currents of his influence. The work that was in his mind, and ready almost in his hand, to do,—the ripe fruit of his great harvesting, all ready to be poured into the longing souls of a whole generation—is not transmissible to any living man. It has passed with him into the invisible, how to be at last returned into these channels of our day we do not comprehend. We know only that it is not lost: that what the great brain and greater heart, with hard and holy pains, gathered for the people and the age he loved, cannot fail to be theirs. But who shall measure now this great bequest, or the great overflows from the same rich fountain for these years past? Not in any man's words can this history be told. It must

write itself through the coming conflicts and the coming victories of truth and liberty and love.

Theodore Parker stood alone: not for lack of personal friends—for every man who will make his mark in the great work of the age was his lover, and hosts of generous and earnest men and women on both continents were his disciples and fed on every word that fell from him as the divinest manna of the times; not for lack of an appreciation more than that of a disciple—few have enjoyed so richly as he that high conversation of kindred and equal minds which compensates the men in advance of their age for persecution, obloquy and all injustice. But in the special function which he assumed, as the popularizer of thought, as the reducer of all wisdom to that simplicity and clearness which is the seizing of it with the whole soul, and the giving of it with the whole heart, and the beholding of it in every possible relation of practical and universal good, and the analyzing of it into every minutest element with the reverent wonder and joy of a child who has found a strange piece of Nature's work, and the recombining them according to the rational processes of the common mind in the attainment of knowledge, so that every living mind should share his joy, and believe itself also the discoverer, and last of all the charging it with the mighty yearning earnestness of a conscience to

which there was no greater sin than to leave the sinner unconvinced, or to let the fearful penalty of injustice and crime fall on the man or the nation for lack of plainness and persistency in the delivery of God's great messages of warning; in this special function he walked alone—no man abreast of him, no man to comprehend all the glory and all the pain which such a function brings. It disparages none of those heroic reformers who have directed themselves more thoroughly than he to special reformatory movements, and who seem to me in some respects to have seen more clearly than he to the root of these questions, to say that Theodore Parker's work, as teacher of truth, covered a broader immediate ground than theirs. Wherever error or vice raised its head through the vast field of theology, literature, political and social economy, or practical life, here was the man to confront it, with a learning, a thoroughness of treatment, a clearness of demonstration, a power of communication to the masses, which no other could wield in so many directions, against all comers. His style was unique in literary history—his own—made for this special work, suited to it as no other ever was outside of that New Testament speech it most resembled. In the whole range of pulpit or platform eloquence there was none like it when it discoursed of the Transient and Permanent in

Christianity, sounding the earliest note of our great Theological Revolution which the people could clearly understand.

Yes, be it pronounced now, clearly and decisively: the function of this great Luther of the age—this more than Luther, because wiser, broader, healthfuller, more trustful towards God, more hopeful of man, about whose life the whole battle of the past with the present and future has raged; this iconoclast so unsparing, this critic so terrible, this thunderer in the ears of guilt in high places, this excommunicated, hated, outlawed revolutionist who has marched to the triumphant place this great assembly accords him at his death through such opposition as has been met in preaching righteousness and truth in this generation—was *meditational*. It was to take the bread of God and break it to the multitude—the bread in old religion and in new researches—the bread disguised by hard creeds and tyrannous traditions and mythologies, crusted into stiff framework for an authoritative faith—the bread hidden behind veils of frowning mystery, covered over with anathemas against the reason and the heart and the whole sacred constitution of the soul—the bread of a theology sublime and sweet, bringing home the God, fatherly and motherly, to the heart, and lifting human nature to recognize in its own familiar laws and needs his in-



dwelling and inseparable love, and ennobling purpose, raying out through all pure affection and aspiration into this outward world, and making its common laws and forms and uses divine—a theology for the learned and the simple, for the truster in fate and the worshiper of freedom—to make the hero and the self-ennobling woman and the free and gladsome child—the bread of an ethical faith, which roused every soul to respect its moral capacity and find the function it could fill, and consecrate itself by undying vows to the service of righteousness and to the redress of all wrong—the living bread of a great ideal of character, which should make life a thing worthy to be lived, fulfilling God's purpose in the gift of life, a democratic ideal, summoning all men and women to this equal sovereignty, the ideal which this age and country is set to proclaim. Above all that seemed to the disciples of the prevailing creeds negative and destructive, towers the great mediatorial function, by which Theodore Parker will stand out hereafter, when the true significance of this religious crisis comes to be understood, and its relation to the Christian idea of Brotherhood, which is moulding and shaping the age. To have first reached the ear of the whole people with this full message of their freedom and their duty, to have put these marvellous powers so perfectly to the sublime use

for which they were sent into this moment and spot, places him at the very gates of the New Dispensation, proclaiming again, Prepare ye the way of the Lord! That is his significance.

Our God, our God, thou shinest here,  
Thine own this latter day;  
To us thy radiant steps appear,  
Here goes thy glorious way!

We claim for him this dear word *mediatorial* forever consecrated, and destined to lose its narrow official sense as fast as men arise like him we honor to-day to compel the title as one of gratitude and love. Here was an intellect wide and far-reaching and subtle, and dwelling with Plato's thought as with Christ's love, which yet had nothing esoteric—held nothing back for favored disciples, but gave freely as it was given to him; its trust in the people, how thorough and how rare it was! What power to meet the wants and win the affection of differing minds! With all the severity of his criticism of opposing views, and his merciless handling of sin, what a broad genial heart and mind must that have been which could hold to itself by close attachments so many men of widely differing views! What earnest thinker but found appreciation with him for what was truly broad and practically helpful in his thought! What young man or woman seeking counsel for the conduct of life failed to find

that their wants were to his wise, wide sight an open secret, and that his kindly interest spared no pains to help them solve it after the manliest and noblest way! What sympathy with the natural piety and affections of the unlearned, with common relations and familiar things, the great warm heart of Robert Burns inspiring the head of Socrates, joining the democratic thought of one with the democratic instinct of the other in rare, fine union! What combination of all those elements of revolutionary influence which existed in separate individuals in the first Protestant Reformation, the Saxon tenderness and faith of Luther, and his battle-words, the studiousness of Erasmus, Melancthon's sweetness and Zwingli's hot and combative zeal, with a logic closer than Calvin's and a martyr-spirit as steadfast as that of Huss, with a grace and piety beyond them all, a something which only the nineteenth century could give the man who used all its means! In this new preacher who denounced the old priesthods and ecclesiasticisms set up as mediation between God and man (in the relation of master and slave) the *pulpit* became a mediator after the form of the liberty of the *children* of God. He has done for it what no other man has done—emancipated its method, revolutionized its style, restored it to the Puritan standard of plainness, and made it the type of universal learning, of

religion, and the instrument of Individual Power. He has raised the standard of the preacher's work so high that a race of intellectual and physical Titans alone can maintain it.

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## THEODORE PARKER

While Theodore Parker lived most men thought him the founder of a new school in theology; and this is still a common impression, giving rise to the term "Parkerite," as if the free thought of the time was somehow the product of his personal teaching. Let us deal more justly with the age and with the man. He was a prophet of natural religion; whence flows whatever is best in the faith of all generations. What sent him from hearsay and prescription straight to spiritual fact, from a Christ of anomalies to a universe of law, was none other than the genius of his time, with higher work in hand than making theological disciples to sit at his or at any human feet. It is the spirit of the age admonishing every thoughtful mind to transfer its homage from persons to principles, and to be quick and fresh with these. It has shown Jesus to have been representative of his time, and is proving that the great men of our day are children of a social inspiration, prophets of thought that everywhere seeks expression. I hope to show, as one judging from a purely independent position, and speaking only in my own name, wherein I think Parker ful-

filled the task of religious revolution. I am not to eulogize him, but to give, if I can, a fair estimate of his work. A generation has arisen to whom the noble record is but little known. I must begin by saying a word of this, for every great movement of mankind has its root in a philosophy of ideas that has long been germinating.

The free thought of all ages had ripened its harvests for this strong reaper's hands, so strenuous to gather them all in, so skilled to convert them to their next and noblest uses.

This reformer had power because he was no erratic, but came in the straight line of tendency—the line of Abelard and Luther, Vico and Laplace—the line of Protestantism and Science, of Puritan honesty, of the New World's claim for universal rights and duties; in the line also of transcendental philosophy, which holds the secret of modern progress. When Descartes dared to say, "*I think, therefore I am,*" certifying existence itself from the processes of his mind, he proved that man had come verily to respect his own inherent powers, and religion as well as thought was new-born. Henceforth the word revelation was to signify culture. Two centuries have been following up this faith that man's natural faculties are his competent guide and ultimate appeal. Spinoza's piety found God in man's thought. The logic of

Kant traced religion to a rock of ages in his moral sense. The scholarship of Lessing showed all his history to be revelation and all his great religions to be inspired. A little later than Descartes we hear two immortal sentences, the one Spinoza's, "To believe blindly the sacred books of one's nation is to believe old errors, I will trust only my own thought;" the other, Lessing's, that he preferred the very effort of freely searching for truth to all outright gift of it from God. These two sentences foreshadowed the coming protest of natural liberty against supernatural authority; the criticism that has ever since been sifting the Church, Bible, creed and name of Christianity, with fearless reliance on the laws of nature and mind.

Then in England and France came strong reaction against Locke and the so-called Sensational School, the method of thought which derives all knowledge from the senses, and involves the conclusion that we have no natural perception of eternal and necessary truths. Coleridge distinguished Reason from Understanding as perceptive of such truths, and the French Eclectics brought the religious wisdom of the world to prove that they come in the spontaneous activity of man's nobler powers; thus testifying to the essential unity of man with God, the inherent bond of finite with



Infinite. These philosophical affirmations rescued thought and faith at once. Religion was recognized as an inward and self-sustained fact, involved in the essence of human nature, not given from without and backed by a bit of miraculous testimony to the senses. Thus philosophical and spiritual minds took fresh courage to seek divine meanings of God, Duty, Immortality, which should be as free as possible of unworthy limitations, as affirmative as possible of that sense of the Infinite, in which their ineffable grandeur dawned on the soul. Of course, to the old mechanical conceptions this was simply to deny them altogether.

So thirty years ago, New England Orthodoxy, with some honorable exceptions, was sounding an alarm against "Transcendentalism" and "Pantheism," "Teutonic metaphysics" and "Infidelity." Literary Germany had "despised Jesus Christ and worshiped her Hegels and Goethes as the Egyptians their crocodiles and calves;"\* while theological Germany, to which by admission of the highest Orthodox authority, American theology owed what scholarship it possessed, was pronounced "given over to a reprobate mind." The true meaning whereof was that the metaphysical theology of New England, based on the notion, correspondent with the sensational philosophy of Locke, that the soul is an empty vessel into which religion

\*Bib. Repos. Jan. 1845.

must be poured by miracle, found itself assailed by a strong tendency among its own most thoughtful pupils to what they called the Spiritual Platonism of Coleridge and Cousin. But the fact was far beyond this. There was already a ferment of Plato, Kant, Spinoza, Cudworth and Carlyle in the educated New England brain, by the natural affinities of freedom, gravitation to ideas of Immutable Truth and the Moral Absolute, to that sense of direct relations and intimacy with the Best which Religion always seeks and means at last when it is mature. That transcendental appeal to first principles, that call to the private soul to know itself an inlet to the deeps of Reason, to interpret the inevitable necessity we all are under to go behind Church and Bible in the interest of self-reliance and self-respect, was the true modern Gospel, the Word of God in this Latter Day; and the phases of its development are still the steps of religious and intellectual progress. A spirit was brooding over the chaos of intellectual discontent and moral yearning, and the finer sense of one listener, still our sharpest hearer of its words, had already caught its song of creation.

Into this interior movement of faith and freedom Theodore Parker was born. His first teachers were its reluctant instruments, its half-conscious imitators, even its clear-eyed seers.

The limits of Dr. Channing in this direction were of the head, not of the heart; and the ever forward look of the prophetic man inspired all younger and freer minds. Parker has recorded the glad reverence with which he listened to his saintly call for a reconstruction of belief; his defense of human nature; his dissuasion from dogma and sect in the name of liberty and love. Carlyle had passed sentence on the materialistic philosophy and the Church that represented it. "The spoken word of England has been false. God's laws have become a greatest-happiness principle; heaven an astronomical timekeeper; nature an old eight-day clock, made thousands of years ago, and ticking still, but dead as brass; which the Maker sits looking at in a distant incredible way." "So," thundered Carlyle, "is it to be no longer," and the young American preacher heard with joy.

Then the immense resources of German criticism, in refutation of the old infallibilities, were in the hands of the insatiate student, who was to put them to true democratic service. It is worth noting that while they were gathering clearness in his mind, Pastor Uhlich and the "Friends of Light" were meeting in German towns to protest against all substitution of theology for religion, pronouncing Jesus a wonderful man, whose followers had made him

God. Ronge and his German Catholic movement were proclaiming full liberty of inquiry; and the German universities were taking a vote on the question (in the case of Bruno Bauer), whether a professor who denied the Christian religion could hold his place as teacher. Even Schleiermacher, apostle of mediation between contending schools, had died, leaving this record, "that his doctrines were remarkable alike for their Christian spirit, and for the devastation they made in ancient faith." He had written to his friend Lücke: "We must confine ourselves to the essentials of Christianity; for the miracles are falling before the knowledge of the day." And nearest and best, Emerson had struck the key-note of the future in his address to the graduating class at Cambridge, in 1838, admonishing them to be not priests but prophets, to leave the dead formalism of the churches, "where none believeth in the infinitude of the soul, but only in some person old and departed," and teach "that man is drinking forever the soul of God."

Parker, then a young preacher at West Roxbury, heard the trumpet-summons with inward ear; went home with soul on fire; took counsel no longer from his self-distrust, and so opened judgment on the Church. A winnowing fan that, as Wendell Phillips said, "scattered the chaff of a hundred sapless years." And in the

people, too, he found the word he brought already moving hidden hearts and toiling masses. When he spoke, his heresies proved so kindred to the undersoil of mind around him that his hearers knew not whether the thought came from without them or from within. Men had not imagined, nor dared to tell, how heretical they were. He found scientific men, recluse philosophers, bold iconoclasts, unexpectedly at his side, to whom his faith was not new. He found the Abolitionists weighing the Church in a balance and renouncing it as infidel to man. He found come-outers on Cape Cod "who used the Bible, but did not call it master," and "worshipped God at first hand." He was astonished to find so many unnoticed men and women actually proving, as he said, that what to him were ideals of faith, could be put into positive conduct and applied to social life.

He absorbed the vital tendencies of his time. Its conscience and piety wrought at his birth. Its democratic instinct warmed his heart. A coal from its high altars of thought had touched his lips. Was he therefore the less spontaneous and original in his own proper force? Not so do I judge the personality that could transform all these materials into a word and work like his.

Such unseen busy forces then had the reject-

ed of the Church to back and urge him. Well might this target for her anathemas stand the stiffer for the shower. Time has been swift to endorse his political radicalism, but his religious came from the same root. Theology wanted its John Brown, and he came, hasting singlehanded, to open the way to the rights of man. Human nature was proving her right of way through Church as well as State. Was it well to rouse Boston against the hunters of men? It was but the intellectual and spiritual side of the same thing to lay bare the fiction of supernatural authority and release the affections and the reason from its grasp.

Let us note here the characteristic of the civilization of which such men as Parker are the natural growth and expression.

America is a summons to first principles and direct intuitions of truth; to the authority of human nature against that of historical prescription; to universal law against exceptional prestige. It substitutes the equal opportunity of all for the absolutism of one, refuses the permanent official, rejects the titles to which all may not aspire; gathers the races into a free continent and asks if these shall be property of monarch, noble, priest or sect—also if this manifold soul of man shall be the dependency of a Messiah or Religious King. It forbids that

the Church shall rule the State or the State the Church, but brings back religion and politics to a common idea. The democratic idea is that every soul has its root in the same soil and sends its branches into the same air from which the divinest are fed; that their genius reports of the common constitution and by that only is made intelligible to mankind. It asks no special revelation to justify its claim of political rights. It can ask none to justify the moral and spiritual brotherhood which these rights mean. It denies authority of political precedent on no grounds that are not as valid for denying that of spiritual. Man's natural faculties are the ultimate test, and there can be no possibility of a supernatural authority that goes behind this test, to override and supplant it. Its appeal is to living experience; it has gathered all races that it might speak in the name of universal human nature, not of its fragmentary parts. Its ideal is before, not behind; it can be realized in no individual, but only in the progress of the race. It refuses therefore to let the race be represented in the past by any historical person or set of circumstances; no man can be federal representative, none be federal head; none wholly manifest the God whose life is in the sum of all. The mythological first man disappears before science; the one barrier to the freedom of the



soul to find its God. "As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive," has had its day. No book, no church, no creed can stand for the reason of a growing race; liberty to think and worship means freedom to work straight in the face of truth and God and see them shine by their own light. They are everywhere the same, and the human eye that sees them has everywhere honor for its divine function. So human nature shall be measured in each not by his attainment but by the common possibility. To this divine democracy the negro shall be no less than man, nor Jesus of Nazareth more. The printed page of to-day keeps only such authority as it can win from the free mind and heart of the age; the Hebrew and Greek Bible shall have no more nor other. The laws that round our human life to-day are our safeguard, and their inviolableness means our good; we should not think it praise of God or man to believe them *broken* for our good of old. We build our Republic on the equal rights of races—shall we build our piety on the exclusive virtue of any special religion? We shall not put a Christian *credo* into the constitution of the State nor a Christian label on the constitution of the soul. The Christian, the Mohammedan, the Jew must join in some broader unity—membership not in the body of Moses, or Mahomet, or Christ, but in the spirit

of humanity. America means nothing less than this.

To this end, America begins with the Moral Absolute, universal principles, resting on the spiritual constitution of man. To these her immediate appeal. Other nations have grown up gradually by accretion of beliefs. The Old World grades and officialisms in politics or religion become not the New, where, as Hawthorne says, "The scent of the pine forests is still too recent" to permit that "odor of old systems," which his fine sense detected in European cities; an odor as of "dead men's decay, garnered up and shut in from generation to generation."

Here is a state that starts with the full-born idea, the Moral Absolute in Christian faith and culture, and is bound to unfold the universal principles by the conflux of all races and religions. Its instant demand for their acceptance springs from no personal or institutional authority in the past, but purely from the self-respect of a mature civilization. It is man coming of age, assuming rights and responsibilities. We have not learned the meaning of this ideal claim, but we cannot escape it. We boldly assume absolute rights, we find that they sheathe duties equally absolute; with or against our will all steps become moralities; all things serve the moral idea and leave it uppermost, transposing

law and constitution till our nationality is born in religious experience.

Inspiration is no longer a past tradition, but a living fact that dwarfs all ages and brings home our idealism from the old Eastern shrines to glorify the promise of to-day. So clearly does our political radicalism point to theological and religious, that the one cannot be accepted in its principle without accepting the other.

The old faith of Christendom, on the other hand, was based, not on the capacity of man for self-government, but on his incapacity. It had shaped a god-man before it had learned respect for God in the nature of man. It had grown up in the reaction from sensational systems, and had made sin the central fact of the soul. The experiences of Paul and Augustin, of repentant bigot and reformed debauchee, were erected into theological ideals, and affirmed as the final word of faith. The function of its atoning Christ was to reign through the humiliation of man, on the theory of a lost race and faculties impotent and accursed. Its plan of redemption by an incarnate God, an infallible Book, a Church floating in an ocean of wrath, like the Ark in the Deluge, was the best that could be devised from this standpoint: but it hated human nature and consigned most men, with all natural powers and desires, to the pit. By its own confession it had been a fail-

ure, appalling and complete, to reconcile man with God. It subsisted mainly by fear. Mind and heart must cringe in self-contempt under this eternal antagonism of God with nature, and revolve in this vicious circle, which no atonement could break.

What could come of the contact of such a system with the life of such an age? Science, philosophy, philanthropy found their paths outside the Church. But what should a system so at war with inevitable beliefs and duties do with morality, the eternal relation of the soul to principles? It had less condemnation for the wicked believer than for the heretic, however loving and just. Its ministers became as servile towards man as they were towards God; bent to popular crime as they did to traditional authority; feared the tyranny of the State as they did the wrath of Jehovah. Its power of demoralizing conduct was greater in the New England character because theology here, always so much in earnest, was an integral part of life. Most of all it outraged and oppressed the moral element.

And from this side came the protest. On the one hand the Church was called to account for its practical infidelity to the slave; on the other for dogmas abhorrent to love and justice, for its unbelief in human nature. This last movement was "Liberal Christianity." It was,

however, but a semi-protest, mainly intellectual, and this too against what was no mere dogma, but rooted instinct. It denied that the race was lost, and the faculties impotent or accursed, but it clung to the belief in miracle and a mediator, beliefs whose only significance lay in the premise that the race *was* lost and that our natural faculties were powerless to save it. It understood neither alternative of the situation. To make appeal to freedom and justice and yet fear to affirm that truth and goodness could stand absolutely on their own merits was to repeat the error of Protestantism and to drop its own function. This intermediateness was mentally demoralizing. As for example its concession that the Bible was the one "fountain of inspired truth," which was nevertheless to be interpreted as "consistency and criticism might demand."<sup>1</sup> As also the theory of "accommodation to the time," by which it explained the errors ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels, and their inconsistencies generally; "the harmony of wax-noses," as Lessing called it in the intermediates of his day. Unitarianism, in fact, was largely fed from the materialism of Priestley and the sensualism of Locke, the study of whom had been made a part of liberal education among the English Dissenters.<sup>2</sup> It became simply a new sect of mechanical supernaturalism on a

1. Lamson's "Statement of Unitarian Belief," 1844.

2. Beard's "Unitarianism," page 100.

limited basis. It even fell back with more anxious dependence upon Jesus for having lost the protecting shadow of the old ecclesiastical structure built in his name. The mediatorial idea became the more intense for the lack of the vicarious. Personal inspiration ran low. The new Protestants, out in the cold and not very warm within, clustered into a sect to keep respectable and safe. Soon Channing is heard protesting against the "New Unitarian Orthodoxy" he saw with alarm, confessing his little hope in Unitarianism, remembering that it "had been at the outset more a protest of the understanding than of religion." Then Emerson rebukes the "habit of dwelling with noxious exaggeration on the person of Jesus." The effect was but to startle Unitarianism into demanding new fundamentals of creed, in which Jesus should still be the main guarantee of God's presence in the ages, and the Book and the Church, by which he was believed to be transmitted, somehow the Noah's Ark of spiritual hope.

Presently comes Parker's sterner sentence on the sect:—"They have become old, not in wisdom, but in lack of hope, in distrust of men, in fear." There had come upon it an earlier "suspense of faith,"—to quote what was confessed of a later phase; an "absence of any further road this way," either to spiritual sight, or theologi-

cal science. One or two experiences of my own I may mention as illustrating its timid, vacillating, servile qualities. When about commencing my studies, nearly thirty years since, I was earnestly advised by a leading Unitarian divine to avoid German literature. I asked what special books. "O, all of them; they are all mischievous, all dangerous." "But can this be true of the whole of German literature? What works have you been reading?" "O, none of them; I eschew them all." Another admonished me not to expect to accomplish much as a minister, young men were apt to put too much faith in human nature. From a third I recollect hearing a sermon of which the following (note the relation of the parts) is a summary: "There are three beliefs about future punishment—First, that there will be none at all: this is against reason and nature; second, that it will be eternal: this is a hateful libel on God and man; third, that it may, or may not be eternal: we should hope that it is not, and this is my own belief." And a fourth in conversation urged that the freedom of man's will made it possible that some might resist God forever, and so never be saved. "How," I asked, "can one's will be free at all, so long as it resists the true order of the universe, to which he himself belongs? Or how can that be God, whose perfect order can be forever resisted in any



soul?" To which question I got no satisfactory reply. These four were all very eminent teachers. I feel duly thankful to them for such part as their timely revelations had in saving me from joining their sect. But such, with a few noble exceptions, were the leading Unitarians at that day. These "liberal" teachers were far behind their predecessors, some in earnestness, all in clearness, and most of them in faith in man.

What the old mechanical Lockian theory of religion could come to, where it did reach definiteness among the Unitarians, appears in Professor Norton's famous sermon on the "Latest Form of Infidelity," by which name he defined all belief in Christianity on internal evidence. Miracles were the "only proof" of a divine origin. They "introduced God within the sphere of human experience;" "made his existence itself a reality to us." And for proof of them, and therefore of all religious truth, the ignorant must rely on the learned. For such dogmas as these the free minds of the time were to be silenced, "not by persuasion so much as by reproach"! Nothing in Mr. Ripley's crushing reply to this sermon is better than his indignant reproof, in the name of the people, of the claim that religion was only to be found in trusting the wisdom and virtue of learned men.

The age swept past the teachers who dared

not or could not accept its tasks. The protest against authority in the name of Human Nature was not to remain a half-way policy. It must become an inspiration; it must have the democratic spirit; the faith in man that comes only of the love of man; the moral earnestness that dares take God at his word, and go straight to the living Reason and Heart with this great idea of human capacity for religion, liberty and light, and bid the race justify it in its actual life. The principle must become a *Man*, ample, broad, realistic, in whom ideas demand instantly to stand fast in practical conduct.

It came to this in Theodore Parker. No more timid hovering between liberty and bondage; no more tampering with the commandment, for condition of service; no more paltering in the interest of sect. The capacity of man, the dignity of human nature, meant trust in it, meant instant and full appeal to it. To be frank with the people was to keep faith with his own soul.

What was true for this man was guaranteed to his thought by being true for all men. Morality, Liberty, Faith, Piety stood in him not as personal privilege, but as common sense.

It was the part of his great instinct for the simply human and real to sweep away whatever forbade religion to be natural, rational, normal, or made the spiritual faculties distrust their native competence to find and follow

truth. The demand for fresh access to deity, the thirst to inaugurate a divine self-respect in man, had made seers, had made philosophers. Here it became a Preacher to the people, took a pulpit for its throne, and brought Church and State to judgment in the name of the common experience, and on their own ground.

There was thus a certain summariness and even contempt in his rejection of all sentimental and mystical devices for finding intermediate authorities between God and the soul. Do you mean that human nature is valid and its development a normal process? Then what place for an official Mediator or Redeemer? What call for miracle, when all that miracle means for the common faculties of Wonder, of Trust, of Awe is in the very process of natural growth itself? Miracles in the Church sense he held fair mark for sarcasm—they meant disrespect and contempt for the laws of *human* nature as well as physical, of mind as well as of matter; supernatural evidences were but a disguise covering the most fatal of all skepticism, unbelief in the competency of the spiritual faculties to discern and authenticate truth. It was the part of this great instinct for the simple, just and real to sweep away without compunction all arbitrary limits to the liberty to think of religion in natural and rational ways. By this intuition of *common sense* the democratic prin-

ciple came to its true affirmation in religion, and brought to judgment all forms of exclusive authority, all monopoly of right to speak for God. Practical religious construction in thought and life became possible. Here was the moral energy necessary to dissolve contradictions, to break up suspense of faith, to cut knots of policy, to clear blurs from the eyes and rubbish from the path.

It was a great step, which, in its full extent, only America made possible. Even Strauss had said: "The gulf between the people and the learned will perhaps never be removed; and each should leave the other to think in its own way." The axe was laid at the root of traditional faith, and we do not wonder at the outcry that arose. The Unitarian ministers were functionaries of a Christ. They clung to the miraculous man as the Calvinist to the whole Bible, as the Roman Catholic to the Church. Parker was no functionary, but a free, living force.

If men who inwardly believed him right opposed him openly, on the plea to their own conscience that others needed beliefs which they could do without, and that the time had not come for them to speak the truth they knew, it was but the common inevitable effect of ecclesiastical and sectarian interests on the moral sense. But was it not also the very purpose for which this man was sent into the world, to

bear witness against all *aristocrats* in thought or institution who dared not trust the free circulation of truth to the common mind?

To all false stewards, who had hoarded wisdom in dainty vessels, his coming was a judgment, and they warred against him with all the might of fear. His absolute faith in the people was the severest rebuke to what Unitarianism had become, even if he had not grieved the brethren by bringing the Unitarian name into ill-repute and damaging denominational hopes. His unanswerable Socratic questions laid bare the weakness of their position, and were provocative of wrath. But "The Discourse of Religion" showed him the master of his own, calm and assured, in the very noon of light, and to refuse him personal and pulpit sympathy was self-condemnation. The dread of him showed the need of him.

A miraculous Christ was the flaw in their logic. And Parker's rejection of miracle surprised these liberal thinkers into confession of a strange unbelief. He was met by the denial of the first principles of religion. It was not only declared that we cannot have intuitive consciousness of God, but that the very morality and piety of the New Testament needed the endorsement of miracle, that without it parable and beatitude were "body without blood." Immortality, it was said, must stand

on apostolic testimony; were Jesus' body to be found, there were no assurance of it left us. The sentence of Parker's sermon on the "Transient and Permanent" which caused most consternation and horror was that in which he had declared that the truths of religion would stand firm even if it were proved that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived. Disbelief in the possibility of miracles was pronounced consistent only with atheism. Compare with this unbelief in any sure access to God but through a broken law the creed of the old Lutheran theologians, that miracles are of no value unless the doctrine they support has proved itself to be true—that they prove nothing of themselves. Compare Luther's own belief that the miracles of real import were those which Jesus wrought on the souls of men. For Parker to deny the miracles of Jesus, in the interest of his character, was to these later Protestants no less than to overturn religion. Yet he had dropped the superhuman official only to unveil the majesty of manhood. Even the older Unitarians had held Jesus to be a man, and left the questions of miracles in suspense.\* How should these Unitarian skeptics who had spoiled Jesus of his Godhood think it infidelity for another to prove him purely human? Parker's thoroughness had made it easier for every semi-rationalist of them all to think and ad-

\* Beard's Unitarianism, p. 162.

vance, and in rejecting him the Unitarian leaders struck away the hand that was guiding them to their only possible ground of consistent faith.

The unworthy stand then taken by this sect has proved its evil genius down to the present moment, when it goes backing and filling between creed and no creed. Denominationalism can learn no lessons, for religion is personal, outside of sect, and grows best by the failures of sect; nor is there any sign of its progress so sure as when such limbos prove unable to hold a free man and his living work. In all ages they who have thought themselves the guardians of religious faith have mistaken its development for its destruction. Their delusions and defeats only show that Religion accepts no guardian but spiritual liberty and knows no goal but God.

To thrust this forerunner from their fellowship was to concede his initiative. For the most reluctant feet were bound to tread his track. Already this heretic to whom was refused the Christian name begins to be claimed as the fruit of Christian culture, and made a foil to fend off what seems to Liberal Christianity a more fatal radicalism than his. Thus the old instinct reappears, though the standpoint has advanced. But it is late to accord to Theodore Parker the name of Christian that he so loved and claimed. In view of the eager insistence

and timid dependence on it as a badge of fellowship, and of the opening questions of universal religion that make such distinctions trivial, I incline to think that if he were living to-day he would not care to accept that name. I cannot but remember that he tested and found it wanting; that there would, in any case, have been less honor in the wearing such a name for a frontlet than there was in the bare brow that could so well dispense with it. I cannot but remember what he wrote to Frances Power Cobbe: "I love to call myself Christian in gratitude to one who taught the true method of religion. But I would not think ill of one who disliked the name. Nay, I doubt if Jesus himself would recommend it."\*

The faith of the age hastens to what is independently human and universal. It was the function of Theodore Parker to serve this democratic idea in religion, with quick instinct for all needful negations, and far greater powers to build than to destroy.

His task was to show religion to be natural and normal. It answered to the very make of the man. In him were united his father's common sense, his mother's intuitive piety. It was not in his blood to crave the Christian change of heart. Only one Parker had ever joined the old church. Theodore was saved very tenderly from the gloomy creeds that bully the reason

\* Letter dated May 5, 1848.



and heart out of self-respect with their anathema upon the depravity of nature. "My head is not more natural to my body," he said, "than my religion has grown out of my soul." The farmer's boy found God's open-air religion of natural use and beauty that belittled all cribs of tradition and sect. "The husbandman's eyes are opened; he walks always in the temple of God." This force of birth and breeding meant facing the facts and understanding them. He did not want to hear our poets sing of Thermopylæ instead of Bunker Hill, or prate of larks and nightingales they never heard, with brown thrashers and bobolinks close at their ears.

His first experience in teaching told him that "natural theology attempted to prove what no child thought of doubting." His whole pulpit was foreshadowed in that perception of the direct grasp of man's spiritual instincts on the truth of things. The hate of all vicariousness and indirection gave him a positive passion for self-help. This was his genius. He put institutions to shame by doing more for them than they could do for him.

From the boy who hired a substitute in farm work that he might get time for schooling, to the masterly scholar who had won his way to the front of preachers and reformers, he asked and expected nothing without paying the price.

He might well dare to claim free field and fair chance for all his capacities. "I also am a tree, not a branch of any man," rooted in the soil where Jesus and Moses and Plato stood and grew. His democratic nature glorified every spark of this spirit. "What if Burns had been ashamed of his plough, and Franklin had lost his recollection of the candle moulds and composing stick?" How his conscience went to invigorate this sturdy realism and self-help! Every talent exacted its fullest efficiency. He was haunted by their claims; held himself to close account for every hour; methodized self-discipline with all the arts of an economist; forecast his whole lifetime with a programme of uses; incessantly urged the scholar's debt to mankind; never preached a right without bringing out the duty that went with it; and even mourned at the end of that titanic achievement that he had but half used the power he had received. If he exacted fidelity of others with hard judgment, remember how sternly he judged himself. Yet this man was held to believe too little in the Justice of God; this critic of character, so severely faithful that all wickedness feared and hated him, was charged by his Unitarian brethren with slurring the fact of sin. They could not explain the contradiction, not suspecting that the fault lay in their own philosophy. Parker saw what they did

not, that if we give evil an ideal prestige by emphasizing it in our theory of human nature, we weaken the efficacy of our moral criticism and appeal. He could insist with the more force on the *duty* to live nobly, for believing that no man *can* heartily love evil because it is evil, and that human nature essentially aspires to good. This was the way to show evil subordinate and incidental, and put the rightful masters of life upon their throne. "I find sins," he said, "conscious violations of natural rights, but not *sin* in the theological sense; intentional preference of wrong as such, to right as such, enmity against God." To believe in this "sin" was so forced and unnatural as to breed defects that came out even in the pronunciation. The very word was apt to be opened with a twang and ended in a whine. It was badly "damaged phraseology," and he seldom used it. The way in which the Orthodox interpreted him showed what a twist the theory gave their mental vision. I have heard preachers charge him with not believing in moral obligation, because he called sin a disease. Probably he did not in their mechanical sense of morality. Of the relation of the conscience to a philosophy so human they had not gained the least notion, even from a life like his.

In everything his conscience was constructive, guiding to practical issues that strict hon-

esty which demanded to know and proclaim the facts. What encyclopædic knowledge in principles and details came of this law of his mind; what minute analyses and collections of instances in all branches of literature; what sweep of arts and sciences! So, too, every item of your personal history was of interest to this friend who would know you as you were that he might stand by you in your best.

A glow of heart and ideal purpose was in this boundless curiosity about men and things, as well as a keen sense of the comic and tragic sides of character, which sought its gratification. It was his American intentness on having the closest relations with human nature that made everything with him run swiftly to personalities, whether of praise or blame. "Contact and direct sense; marshal whatever you can reach or handle to its ideal uses," was his gospel. This constructive honesty was a genius for orderly development. His sermons would appear mechanical but for the moral and spiritual fire that shows their methodical unfolding of ideas to be spontaneous and free. Doubtless something of his father's mechanical skill came down in this literary constructiveness. A living sermon could be framed as conscientiously as a dead tool. It is a fact to be noted that these sermons, meant for the people, the first popular treatment of highest relig-

ious truth, rely not less on ideal relations than on the simplest processes of thought and the accumulation of details.

He was never weary of teaching how ideas haste to institutions. It was because his own conscience was the instant pressure of faith to action. Hence the moral power that could hold every pulpit and statesman in the land attentive to its warning or rebuke, square every public measure with the highest standard, ever ready with the blow that laid open the heart of wrong, going about every piece of redress as if life depended upon it and not a moment were to be lost. Who shall adequately describe that magnificent working force in the manifold forms to which it gave such fresh vitality as almost amounted to new creation! What channels it filled with creative life—Pulpit, Platform, Lyceum, Moral Reform—every open or hidden path for freedom and brotherhood, for spiritual hope and joy, for strong persuasion and manly wrath! What honor to the brave strong worker waves in the harvests of that toil; to him who shouldered the great tasks of such a time, and bore them victoriously to the last!

His power was less shown in speculative than in practical thought. This was partly because his master-instinct was sympathy, and so intense that it never allowed him the repose and perspective for contemplation. He was full of

human nature. No farmer's boy, no mechanic's apprentice should fail of his meaning. He believed that "craftsmen can express any truth, never so high or deep, in the technical terms of the shop;" for he had entered into their life and identified it with his own. To hold back truth from the common mind, where it belonged, was for him the one thing not to be forgiven in preacher or politician. He recognized inspiration by the sign that it sped home to the simple heart. "When the voice comes up from the ground, I cannot refuse to hear." "Once piety built up theocracies; now democracies. It is diviner work." It was not chance that made preaching his joy and crown. He was framed for interpreting to men their own natural sense of the divine; and his style grew so domestic, that they felt themselves at home in truths they had been taught to trace to far-off fountains. Cultivated minds were apt to find more detail of precept and illustration in his preaching than they needed. But he was a democratic Socrates, sent to open the simplest mind to itself. The thought which Coleridge or Emerson would have fused into an immortal epigram he struck out into applications, till it shone through the common life like a heaven of stars. He made his hearers conscious of unsuspected birthrights, finding religion to be no remote prerogative, no fruit of election, no re-

vival agony, no surrender to Christ; but natural living, according to the best, the free flow of the faculties towards the infinite they desire and need; that genius of the heart whose yoke is easy and whose burden light. He summoned men not to subtle thought nor to fine art, but to the self-respect that must prepare the way for these. His ear was so close to every cry from the ground, he so felt the immediate wants of men, that he resolutely postponed beauty to utility, Michael Angelo to Franklin, the fine arts that adorn life to the coarse arts that feed and clothe and comfort a people.\*

Yet we shall not complain that the cause of the people constrained their special advocate; making him insist on the indispensable first conditions of their culture; not valuing refinement less, but its diffusion more. What right have we to fill our dainty cabinets, and cultivate æsthetics, with barbarism holding its carnival of blood and terror through the Republic?

Interpret him from his sympathies. No man ever forgot more thoroughly the ambition for intellectual display in the passion to cheer men with the knowledge of what was best in others or themselves. No instance escaped him. Manly lives and noble institutions were the flowers of his rhetoric, which he wreathed round

\*How he would have greeted our own Bret Harte, whose genius knows how to find the poetic ideal where it is least expected or sought, as the breadth of his humanity binds East and West into one America of noble sympathy, hope and faith.

the Principles he enforced. How much larger in this kind was the Boston radical's opportunity than the Wittenberg monk's, who seldom had a good word to say of his fellow-reformers, and who would not eat nor drink with Jews. You can measure the advance of this age beyond the Reformation-time by this difference in their great preachers. How generous Parker's recognition of the genius and virtue that all must confess! Yet he loved most to bring honor to unrecognized values, to count up the good men and women he knew, in all conditions, of all religions; many too with no religious name, yet so much religion that they had not given an account of it to themselves.

The meaning of that Pulpit was, that "truth is every man's opportunity;" a new meaning for the pulpit itself, as witness its thousand doors shut fast in the twinkling of an eye against the man who had more truth to give than hid behind them all. Remember how Evangelical ministers prayed in concert that God would "put a hook into the jaws" of this leviathan! "Silence him, O Lord, for thou knowest we cannot answer him!" How significant it was that the pulpit of the "Ministry to the Poor" in Boston should be opened at once to this Advocate of the People by its faithful occupant,\* and that the brave act should cost him his place at the hands of his Unitarian brethren. Yet

\* Rev. John Turner Sargent. [Eds.]



Parker's relations of sympathy were not to be measured by his pulpit hearing. This heretic, whom the churches did their utmost to prove a schismatic and destructive, and to make their charge come true, proved himself to be, in no ordinary sense, a mediator. No teacher gathered about him so large a variety of minds: all opinions, aspirations, tastes, met in council at his house. The theology, literature, science, social reform of Europe and America found a common centre in his hospitable mind. For the exiles of liberty and the waifs of culture here was a port of refuge, a finer America for heart and brain. His living bread was broken to millions; no religious teacher in America ever had such audiences. And as he went up and down the land from the Mississippi to the St. John year after year, feeding the multitudes, the church appeared to be the schismatic after all.

There has been no genuine reform moving for the last thirty years, whose history may not be read in the utterance of that Pulpit—not a wave of the age but has felt the impulse of its great faith in the people. Just when the function of preacher seemed to have had its day, and was becoming a dragweight upon the hopes of the race, he gave it new prestige and made it champion of them all. Here at least he was a builder; if only to show that a great

personality can make what it will of its sphere. Wendell Phillips well said that "he criticised other pulpits not so much by censure as by creation; by a pulpit proportioned to the hour."

Not Voltaire was a sharper critic, nor Rabelais apter in sarcasm; but this scourger of superstition in a happier day had neither the vanity of the one nor the coarseness of the other. More than either he had the great sense of justice that made their very negation belief. There was a Hebrew prophet in him, that could mock aloud at the strongest oppressor. Every power he had should tell upon that head till it fell. This moral conviction indeed sometimes played the tyrant with him, so that he could not keep the finer mood, nor allow for the ignorance or weakness of others. Did it embitter him to be held a pulpit Mephistopheles, his very element denial and subversion? No, but he made the most of this wrong-dealing,—being what he was, *a man at arms*,—by turning it against the creeds it grew from and giving blow for blow. He loved the storm of battle when he was in it. Yet probably no heretic ever suffered so many poisoned arrows to fall unnoticed from the armor of his self-respect. He said that "the destructive part of his work was painful" to him, and they who knew him best believed it, that it was "slight compared to the building" therein; and this is proved

by the record. "The words they call mockery I wrote in tears." It is not hard to suppose that true. Christians do not think their master took pleasure in bringing a sword on earth instead of peace. I see almost the tenderness of personal bereavement in that great faithful testimony of Parker's on the life of Daniel Webster, which many honest men thought heartless and malignant.\*

He accepted the necessity of strife with a surprise that grew to indignation at men's disloyalty to conviction, and his trust deceived reacted into scorn. But he did not undervalue the peace which leaves us free for ideal production and brings gentler judgment of men. He surrendered that with a heavy heart in the opening of his life. So did he many other tastes and desires for special culture. "My time of rest will never come; so long as I live I must war against the false gods and their priests as false."

His work was essentially constructive both in spirit and form. His method was that of deduction; beginning with the Absolute Idea, and unfolding from it moral claims, relations

\*"They who would know Mr. Parker should read that oration. It was, as has been said, written literally with prayers and tears, in clearest memory of every step in Webster's career." "That wonderful oration,—eulogy, litany, arraignment, verdict—was written at a heat. The preparation for it covered weeks, nay, occupied years. . . . A few hours of solitary meditation in the country, after the statesman's death, fused the mass of material so completely that it ran like molten metal into the literary mould."—O. B. Frothingham, "Theodore Parker," 1874.—[Eds.]

human and divine, and throwing details into broad masses about it, flooded with its central light. This man, charged with destroying faith, was an idealist to the core. Few men have so loved to seek out the remedial forces in character, the inner mastership of good and the reserves at its command. In offset to his Dantesque pictures of practical and speculative atheism, he refused to allow the possibility of being wholly atheist; delighting to show how men might be essentially devout who denied all knowledge of religion, having the affectional form of piety, knowing well the infinitely Just and Good, but not under the name of God. He was quick to bear witness that Atheist and Pantheist revered the Higher Law when Church members denied it, as quick to note that even the misbehaving would not willingly be without light and love. None had a greater gift at idealizing persons, in youth revering the elders like a child, wishing he could be as great and holy as the famous Unitarian ministers who were afterwards to be scourged the harder when he had weighed them in the balance and found them wanting. Parker idealized Jesus as few scholars could do while so fully perceiving the imperfections of his teaching. He saw human nature, in its promise and destiny, as an ideal goal. So its prophet should see it, just as you must treat a child or a flower, with

a view to what it is made for becoming, if you would help it grow. While he could ridicule superstition and fossil beliefs, he could still prize the germ once in them that had been needful for human growth. His hot rhetoric seemed sometimes to deny this insight, but his calmer sermons shine with it. Thus he called the grossest fetichism an early instinctive seed that was one day to blossom out into the idea of the Infinite God. Duelling and private revenge, a shame to civilization, had grown out of the love of right in rude times. He traced the sacramental idea from its first steps in savage life through the groping after God that consecrated special days, books, forms, up to the piety that made all work and culture worship. The barbarous beginnings of great beliefs were not to be despised. His historic sense had much of the tenderness that could not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; just as it warmed his heart in the great Melodeon to think of the little West Roxbury church. "Shall we write satires on mankind? Let us rather write its apology." Did he not all the more clearly recognize a Historic Providence that "sent the truth as men were able to bear it" for "refusing to eternize the forms in which their rude instincts clothed it"? It was the dream of his life to trace out in a broad and permanent way, after his pulpit work was

over, the definite functions of human faculties, races and beliefs. The sketch of this great survey which he has left us, though I cannot accept all its judgments, proves at least how large was the scope of his interest and how inexhaustible his resource.\* But the great moral struggle that so needed him held him to the last its minute-man.

I cannot help urging this constructive aspect of his character, as the one least recognized even at this day, when the passions aroused by his stern rebukes are beginning to cool. Those who have held him to be negative and unbelieving have not marked his large respect for persons, from which his severity, when disappointed, was but reaction. Recall a few of his golden sentences: "The wickedest life is no absolute failure." "There is no dead sea of humanity anywhere." "Mankind never put up a gravestone to evil as such; never forgive those who teach the theory of sin." "I never knew a minister half so bad as Calvinism." He was even criticised for over-estimating the honesty of men in trade; for suggesting that they were oftener better than their reputation than worse, that there were a hundred honest bargains for one that was dishonest. "We live in our human nature as the Mexicans in California, not knowing the unsunned gold that slept there unseen. Much as I have thought of

\* Sketch of Development of Religion.

them, I have never done justice to the present growth of these beautiful faculties; more treasure than I dreamed of lay hidden where I looked." This his last word, after thirty years' close conflict with every evil of his time. The strictures on such statements gave him more pain than any other criticism. Men could not comprehend how one who so sternly rebuked actual vices could be so flooded with boundless faith in human nature. Now the pulpit popinjays who draw crowds in the city where he toiled for God and man charge him with not believing in moral responsibility. By and by men will read his history most clearly in the light of such words as these. The age in whose institutions he found so much to destroy was to him the promised day, full of the prophecy of good, and the harvest was to his eye folded in the seeds of noble living and earnest thought dropped into the ever-fertile field of religion. "*Sursum Corda*" was his anthem. "Do men tell you this is a degenerate age, that Religion is dying out? Tell them that when those stars shall have faded, and others have taken their places, religion will still live in man's heart, the primal, everlasting light of all our being. Take from the past courage, not its counsel. Fear not to be now a man."

This affirmative faith in man was but the out-

come of his faith in God. He was God-possessed as few men have been; haunted by a vision of religion as meaning normal play of conscience, heart, mind and will, of prayer as their natural flow to their ideal. His own public devotions had an almost Hebrew demonstrativeness of reverence, dependence and trust. Yet such intimacy of communion was in them that they could hardly have suggested an outside deity even to colder understandings. Here he helped to mediate between pietist and positivist, both of whom could see that such prayer was life. Perhaps he somewhat lacked the mystic in his intellectual perceptions—was too strongly practical, for instance, to do justice to Spinoza and the Pantheistic East. But there was no such lack in his religious sentiment. He counted as his harvest-times, he tells us, the “moments when truth flashed on his soul in wise passiveness,” and he felt the “beating of that great Heart which warms us all with a life that never dies.” He could worship God as “the reality of all appearance, the materiality of matter and the spirituality of spirit,” the “soul of all souls.” His delight in his own assurance of being thus possessed, was ever rising to his lips, not in personal assumption, but as one would tell his happiest moods to his friends. He too felt that spiritual pantheism, God all in all, which no worship of the Infinite ever escaped.



Parker's sense of God led to his solution of man and of nature, reading them from above, not from beneath, and bringing them guarantees of all ideal good; an optimism kindled into prophecy by indignation at the old creeds that had made sin the defeat of a divine purpose in both. It was the best possible human nature and the best possible world because under the best possible laws; each man's life an infinite good; physical evils the means of growth; error a necessary step; pain a divine economy; the tendency of life upward (what is imperfect here a future life must complete); no absolute evil; slavery, war, drunkenness, despot's oppression and priests' hypocrisy still serving a divine purpose. Human nature was well made, its laws perfect; creation involved the absolute good of the created; in a word, man's destiny revealed in his aspirations, the universe adequate to his needs. The fictions of a lost race and a world without God seemed to him so hideous that he could not make his counter-claim too strong. Man had an "undeniable right to be created from the best possible motive;" to be "governed by a Providence so special that everything should be definitely foreordained to good." Providence was the "duty of God." "The very molecules that hold the leaves of this sermon were eternally foreknown." Phrases which show indeed what lack of philosophical clearness be-

sets the whole method of ascribing plan and purpose to the Infinite. He reached a deeper apprehension when he said, as he once did, that "God was not rightly described either as personal or as impersonal."

God immanent: the constancy of law not a dead mechanism outside God, but his present life, no invention for the universe, but its natural inspiration; man one with God through piety that will flow unforced, as the beaver builds and the blackbird sings, as soon as right culture is integral and not partial; religion spontaneous and free, rejoicing in the consciousness that the laws of our nature are the life of God, —this was his ever-renewed homily and hymn of praise. Well might it be also the burden of his prophecy. From a theology that had turned human nature out of doors before it would let God in, what rescue for religion but in the cry, "Here, here is God; in the very powers you spurn, in the laws that they live and move by, in your best human opportunity: here find your liberty and your joy!" If this was not to unfold a science of belief, it was to summon the popular faith to steps that make science possible. The spiritual philosophy of the future must rest on the adequacy of man to reveal God. Parker's fine instinct of religious spontaneity was a harbinger of this truth. Here was an idealism reacting against those

utilitarian tendencies that made him such an admirer of Franklin. It was a manly instinct, repudiating all forced and servile relations, and justifying without irreverence Seneca's noble maxim that "man should become no longer a beggar of deity, but its companion." The whole movement of thought and faith of which Parker was the democratic expression proceeds on this sense of self-reliance and self-respect. And coming as it did in him face to face with the cringing theology of fear and despair which it was to supplant, it could not always free itself from satire and scorn.

The mischief of that theology was in the perversion of the sense of moral evil. For any philosophy of evil that makes it a positive essence must come either to Pessimism or to Manichæism, an evil God equal with the good or mastering the good to the corruption of the whole. Christianity, starting with a devil, came logically to an everlasting hell, which is but another name for the sovereignty of evil will over divine love. A true philosophy of evil makes it to be illusion, destined to change its aspect to us as we come to look back on it from broader and higher experience of the purposes of our moral strife. Nothing else will explain it to the thought. Parker did not reach such a philosophy; he would doubtless have treated it with contempt, from his inability to

separate philosophy from practical ethics; but it is really involved in his and all other optimism, and the coming time will accept it as it will the Pantheism of Spinoza. When he taught that evil was no absolute essence, but necessary imperfection forever made the ground of growth, and that the only practical solution of its problems was manfully to battle down all inward temptation and outward wrong, and to put noble living as the best argument for noble belief, he was really urging those first steps in conduct which alone can make this higher philosophy comprehensible and which are now everywhere preparing its way.

Another sign that he represented a moment of fresh creative ideal life in the history of the soul is that his theory of authority was an appeal to the present facts of the spiritual consciousness; that he rested truth on the actual living intuition and observation of these, and on nothing else. The beliefs in God, Duty, Immortality he held to be always intuitively given, as representing man's direct relations to the spiritual universe. But for the noble forms of these beliefs which he enforced his appeal was, justly, to the civilized consciousness alone; only demanding that it should be the best the age could attain, the freest from traditionalism, the most open to the sense of present deity. This, whether as intuition or observation, must

be the highest authority, and to this all questions of belief must be brought for fresh judgment. The appeal is tacitly assumed in the ardor with which he threw himself upon the rights of common sense, in the demand that truth should stand upon its own merits, and not by outward authority—in the way in which he used the word *Absolute* as applied to religion.

"Paul's problem," Parker said, "was to separate religion from the Mosaic ritual; Luther's from Church Forms; now it is to separate it from the letter of Scripture and all personal authority, and leave it to stand or fall by itself." This meant simply that at last man must be competent to direct perception of the truth by which his spirit lives.

If we ourselves cannot see, the men and books the Church has brought down to forestall this inward verification cannot see for us. Are not science, freedom, humanity, spiritual culture better eyes than ignorance of nature and submission to what contradicts it in the name of God?

Of the witnesses of God which he found available for man—namely, the works of nature, the words of wise men, the infinite aspirations of the soul—the last he held to be the best. He would not have the religious sentiment legitimated by the sensations of the Apostles. He

would not have that taken as part of essential belief which "hung as a millstone about the neck of many a pious man." Knowing it the ultimate Judge, he made fresh appeal to the status of the spiritual faculty—not from philosophical perception, but from a religious ardor and manly self-respect which would not doubt or philosophize about what was so real to his intuitions.

This preacher aimed less at proving truths than at stirring those finer moods of the spirit which are in fact the pure eye and ear for truth itself. I know not how he could have done better than that. For surely a noble desire is itself the best warrant that its object is in some sense or other real. Is not every divine thought God's demonstration of himself? Of Immortality, for example, there can be no outward proof. Love, longing for the best, thirst for progress, the sense of infinite worth in life and of the eternal in character—these are its evidence; if these say man is immortal, that is enough. To this, then—the educated religious instinct and insight of the age—our prophet of natural religion made his appeal.

That the spiritual eye sees truth directly, that religion is spontaneous, that the moral instincts speak in us in their own right, that the good and true and just shine in us as recognized by a natural affinity,—this is the ground

on which outward authority for spiritual truths must be set aside. In proportion as we are spiritually alive we refuse to believe that truth is true merely because some one taught it, or that love is beautiful and right because a book declares it so. If Bible, miracle and church were infallible, they could not be authority to master the soul's original force. But they are human and so not infallible, marked by the errors of the civilization which bore them. To take these for authority is double slavery; it enslaves not freedom only but the moral sense, binding it to superstition and vice, after the light has come to make the bondage more fatal. The arguments with which Parker assailed the infallibility of the Bible—showing the uncertainty overhanging the origin of the books, their internal contradictions, the moral imperfections of their writers, and the spuriousness of the claim to divine authority set up for the Semitic conceptions of duty; the naturalness of all this in a collection of the literature of a single people, and the absurdity of making that one people and their book the center and sum of revelation, whose canon began with them and with them should close—were nowise wanting in originality, while the mode of statement was distinctively American, the most practical ever made and the most effective for the wants of the people.

Yet no one has more clearly and devoutly recognized the eternal element in these books. He had a kindly yearning towards the Jewish race, whose superstitions he had warred on, and he tells us how gratefully, in memory of what that people had done for mankind, he laid a pilgrim's stone on the grave of a Hebrew patriarch who died in some old European town a thousand years ago. No man can appeal to Theodore Parker to justify a wholesale contempt of the volume he dared to sift with a courage that proved him worthy of the work. He boldly said that he could not find the God of Infinite Perfection in Old or New Testament, but always a limited God, with a devil beside him, the created fiend ever getting the victory over his creator. The brains of German scholars had teemed with the like criticisms, though never in the same form. But these were resources others dared not or cared not to use, or paid not the price to find. The arguments were new to those for whom they were meant. They made men aware how the pulpit had served its confiding flocks. If they were not new, they were new-born; no dead bones, but armed men, who went straight to their work and did it, as other well-led German armies have done since. It was the stark valor, the sturdy common sense, the frankness and plain dealing, the single aim,



the passion for justice, the enthusiasm of faith in God and man, that made the student's toilsome accumulations a new birth to millions, through a storm that rent the old church of tradition from spire to corner-stone.

It was what America was waiting to hear; what the founders of her *political* liberty, her Jefferson and her Franklin, had hinted but left unspoken. The secret impulse of *religion* also to break its bonds was in the air they cleared of the divinity of kings. No refutation of bibliolatry had been so practical and complete as Parker's. It was the first that met the wants of unschooled men.

It was charged that he treated honest faith in miracles with needless ridicule and sarcasm. Indeed he showed it little tenderness. But the theological tyranny it exercised left no chance for a free appeal to human nature, nor even to common sense. Do but hear, for instance, what it did with the wits of orthodox Professor Pond, who reasoned thus: "If the Bible is true, then the miracles it records actually took place; and if they really took place, as there described, then the Seal of the Almighty is on the sacred volume which contains them." And then hear Unitarian Professor Norton: "Nothing is left of Christianity, if its miraculous character be denied. Its essence is gone."

At best the belief in miraculous testimony

had its weak side, which bred moral enervation, fear of natural laws, doubt of man's proper force. A faith that has outlived its time is fed by sentimentality and factitious feeling, needing treatment according to its kind. The practical reformer's keen sense of this has had its part in the religious movement of our age.

Parker did not lightly reject the miracle. He knew its spells, for he began by traditionally believing in it, and failed to appreciate Strauss' demolition of its New Testament claims. He worked his way through the evidence for the Bible miracles and found it insufficient. Then it grew clearer to him that the violation of a physical law could not be a divine way of proving truth; that a material prodigy could never prove its worker fit to be a spiritual guide. Here was iconoclasm indeed! But it was in the interest of such construction as had not entered into the dream of that which he destroyed. He saw plainly, too, that though an event as yet unexplained, or the operation of some physical law yet unrecognized, may be *called* a miracle, still this sense of the word makes it useless for theological purposes, and should not be brought into the discussion, as it was then and has been ever since introduced to shift the issue by a double meaning. His rejection of the theological miracle was in the name of the constant Miracle

of Law, the sweet familiar mystery and unfathomable divineness of common things, from the grass of the field to the love and hope and trust of the heart.

This iconoclast, whose work was set by his belief that the ecclesiastical conception of God denied every one of his attributes, that the Church had proved itself a failure by a theology hateful to the moral and religious sentiment and a practice infidel to man, had yet a warm sense of historic gratitude, wherewith he was quick to admonish himself. "The Church is the mother of us all, and though in her dotage she call us infidel, far be it from us to withhold the richly-earned respect."

The "Discourse of Religion" was a very fair statement of the merits and vices of existing systems, theological and ecclesiastical, and while quick with moral indignation at religious tyranny, indifference and cant, was the most thoroughly judicial and philosophical that had yet been made, and laid the foundations of Absolute Religion not only in justice to living intuitions and freedom, but also in most generous appreciation of the religious history of mankind.

It was one of Parker's troublesome questions to the Boston Association of Ministers in 1845, to which he could get no answer, whether they thought "Jesus had exhausted the ca-

capacity of man or the capability of God." They could not say *yes*, for they had already denied his Godhood and assumed the right to define his powers and claims. They could not say *no*, for they still practically paid him religious homage.

Parker refused to hang in this suspense between God and man, accepting neither. He saw God in man wherever he saw holiness and love: godliness and manliness were one. As "a man of rare religious genius, Jesus was divine," but while we "take all the good we can from such men, we must never make them our Lords." This was the substance of his idea of Jesus. But for lack of time, or want of philosophical interest or gift, he never clearly defined the relation of the Galilean Teacher to his own age and the historical sources of his personal power and beliefs. While he never even from the first accepted an *official* Christ, his idea of the intellectual and spiritual stature of Jesus seems to have changed as he grew older and saw more clearly what was involved in humanitarian principle and in the free and full study of the New Testament records. In his early "Discourse of Religion" he hints of intellectual limitations; doubts if Jesus taught some errors, excuses others. Later, he sees that Jesus could not have been sinless. "Men without sins exist only in the dreams of girls;

we shall never see such an one." Later still, he finds definitely that Jesus taught an eternal devil, an angry god, an endless hell, serious imperfections indeed to Parker's conception of the divine. Yet, while thus from first to last criticising in details the personal attainment of Jesus, he somewhat inconsistently took his central idea of Love to God and Man and made him stand for that, inferring that he must have been greater than his disciples could present or imagine him. He held Jesus personally dear as a grand and pure reformer, and could not take full account of the defects in his record. No Christian ever surpassed this heretic in genuine moral and spiritual regard for the person of Jesus. It carried him off his own proper ground and offered handles to his Trinitarian opponents. "We owe the truth to God; the revelation of it to Jesus, his chosen Son. The truth as it is in Jesus shall never pass away." "Exalt him as much as you can," he said, "you shall yet fall short of the mark." He constantly insisted that our greatest want was to get back to the "Christianity of Christ."

In this there was something of the weakness of that traditionalism of sentiment which he so strongly assailed. The advocates of the Church theory of a central official Christ have no right to the immense weight of such a concession. Even at the outset Parker "suspected

that we very much idealize Christ," and drew a comparison between the ideal Christ and the actual Jesus. Yet he maintained that this ideal Christ should be preached, going so far as to insist strongly on the importance of the name Christian, while he gave it as free a sense as it allowed. He declared that "every man must be his own Christ, if he is to be a Christian," that "we are saved by the Christ we form in our hearts," and even that "mankind is the ideal Christ."

Parker gradually ceased attempting thus to use current phrases with new meanings, or to mediate between opposing beliefs by adhering to words that stood for traditional errors; dropped all official names for Jesus, and the disposition to idealize or even to urge his personal claims. I doubt not he gave less and less emphasis to his "preference of the Jesus of historical truth to the Christ of theological fancy," and more and more to another and broader preference, that the sum of his conviction was (and this I think his best word on the subject) "No man is so great as mankind. Every genius for religion will add new facts to the world's religious experience, as much since the death of Jesus as before. The road is easier after a saint has trod it, but no saint travels the whole length."

In this direction of positive religious thought

the true, broad use of the intellectual faculties, which is their real emancipation, not yet by any means completed, Parker's presentment of Jesus left much to be wrought out by others. He saw that Jesus was "as intensely natural as Franklin or Burns," that "the beginning of him was when Moses led up Israel out of Egypt;" but as already said he did not fully trace the facts of his relation to his time and the older sources of New Testament Christianity. The great picture of that age of revulsion, its confluence of Hebrew, Greek and Oriental civilizations, out of which Christianity was born, was yet to be constructed. The best historical and critical science of the day is doing wonders in bringing to clear light this hitherto hidden world of which Jesus and his religion were the outgrowth. It shows how much of that conventional "night which wrapt the heathen world in gloom" was located in the eyes of the Christian reporters rather than in the heathen world itself. Renan's lively ingenuity has not done so much to this end as the more serious and solid studies of Hilgenfeld and Nicolas and Zeller and Denis. Already it is unusual to speak dogmatically of Jesus in the old excess of spiritual homage. Nor shall we ever hereafter give the prominence to his person that Parker did. Religion is rapidly being freed from dependence on special individuals. It hastens for-

ward to its principle of direct unprescribed relations to the Infinite. This is not the requirement of thought and liberty only, but the compulsion of critical study itself. In this direction there is more of doubt than desire to put something better in place of such dependence, more than dares honestly confess itself and stand by the consequences. I do not associate Parker's name with any such fealty to one teacher or example as should discredit the independence of spiritual forces and universality. We cannot continue to speak of the Christianity of Christ as the "Absolute Religion." The errors in the teaching of Jesus which Parker himself admitted are, to go no further, incompatible with what we mean by the perfect love of God and Man. We can no longer deny the claim of Judaism that it had already taught the ethics and piety of the New Testament, that what is called the revelation of Jesus was but the copy of its noblest thought and love. The scholar must accord to Jewish writers like Salvador and Geiger and Philipppson the respect which Parker refused them, and the age will give fresh hearing to their side of the great question between these two religions and their diverse estimates of Jesus. The sublime and persistent Monotheism of the Jew obviously holds over to a new appreciation through the



centuries of a Christism in whose gospels he finds his fathers called thieves and robbers and children of the devil, and whose worship of Jesus reduces the Eternal to an "intangible effluence" from a man and a book.\*

We shall learn caution in praising Jesus, conscious how little we really know of one whose biographers have drawn so largely in their portraiture on the spirit and resource of their time; conscious that the record which is our only common ground of judgment shows him partaker of its darkness as well as of its light; conscious that we ought at last to allow for the parallax of history, the medium of idealization through which we have been seeing him; since the main business of all Christian ages with him has been to use all the light which comes with progress to transfigure his person and his name. We shall proclaim liberty to the moral and spiritual ideal from this rotation about a single historic centre. The maturity of faith and science will know how to find in the life of humanity that which Christianity, on bended knees, has been painting upon the background of the past. It was the part of Theodore Parker's naturalism to clear the path for this grand and timely deliverance. And I think

\*The narrowness of Christianity is still such that in the revision of the Bible now being made by the great religious denominations of England, that race is excluded of which the Bible is in fact neither more nor less than the native literature, and by whose scholars, equal to any in the world, it has been specially studied in its original tongue.

that even his loyalty to his own ideal Jesus will not impede its certain progress so much as it will help to maintain our hold through an era of criticism on whatever is noblest in personal character in every age and race.

Parker was not primarily metaphysician or speculative thinker. His very style lacked philosophical clearness and point. He was a prophet, a man inspired by great conscience and faith to speak a living message and to do an instant work, to use his powers rather than to study them, interpreting the facts of human consciousness in the light of his aspiration, and holding them to moral and spiritual purposes, rather than searching for their hidden grounds. This philosophy will be the spectroscope of soul; not content with analyzing a ray of its light, but revealing the whole substance of this living sun. We want the spaces open above us. We shall not see the better by figuring a firmament, whether of the Biblical or the Positive sort, for these invisible skies. But the scope of Parker's philosophy in ideal recognitions befitted a prophet of the humanities in presence of the broadest speculative culture.

Thus, his term Absolute, as applied to religion, had nothing whatever to do with the subtle question of the possibility of a knowledge of the "Unconditioned." It meant simply that the human faculties were adequate to find

such truth as they need, and that they could never need any other spiritual guidance than the "Love of God and Man." This is Free Religion. To make its appeal was to apply the profoundest truth of metaphysical science. To go behind supernaturalism to trust in the validity of man's faculties, was to take as common sense and make the starting-point of religious faith what Descartes and Leibnitz and Kant had worked out as the starting-point of philosophy. Our American prophet took this spiritual common sense for granted and suffered nothing to disparage these natural forces. Kant had found faith in man's moral nature the only escape from the antagonisms of the intellect. But the Church had argued from these antagonisms to the impotence of man and the necessity of his abasement before special revelation by supernatural means. Parker practically made the nobler resort of Kant valid to refute these results of the Church theory. A special revelation cannot alter the structure of the human faculties, nor give them a certitude this had not previously allowed, and the shallow philosophy of Mansel in the interest of Supernaturalism breaks down upon this fact of common sense. The claim for the moral and spiritual intuitions as valid is the true answer to this system, if that can be called a system which cuts away the foundations of all

thought by leaving nothing for man to work with.

Schleiermacher had tried to reconcile faith and science, but his sentimental devotion to the interests of the Church made him hover between trust in the powers of human nature and sense of the need of a Redeemer—and his mediation failed. Belief in the sufficiency of the intuitions, enlightened and unfolded by civilization, is the only possible form of reconciliation between science and faith, accepting both in their natural relations. Parker's appeal to intuition did not *demonstrate* God, Duty or Immortality. It presumed a spiritual power of perceiving these truths in some form, and sought to bestir it to action by celebrating the sweetness, dignity, authority, indispensableness of the vision it unveils. Immutable Morality brought where its great early advocate, Cudworth, did not bring it, to test the creeds of Christendom, is the only key to positive spiritual science and faith in one.

No philosophy of religion is possible so long as religious certainty is made to rest on the authority of a person. And this indeed is the charge of modern Judaism against Christianity, that it has and can have no proper philosophy even of history, but is only the worship of an individual. Hegel and Schelling are proofs of this. They abandon the independence

of philosophy, and fall into pure bondage, when they endeavor to confine philosophical ideas, the revelation of human consciousness, within the moulds of Christian dogma, by ideally constructing this dogma for the purpose. The philosophic spirit fails whenever persons are made the centre instead of principles; whenever the immutability of the laws of human nature is sacrificed to the notion of a mediatorial interference with its process and tendency. These exceptionalities are fatal to the idea of science, of historical development to confidence in the very laws of thought itself. To imagine that God could condense all possible religious light in one individual, and after that to talk of religious philosophy! To conceive of a plan of salvation by miracle thrust into the movement of human nature, to contradict its whole tenor and aim, and then to talk of a philosophy of history! Plainly all this must be swept away before philosophical or historical construction can begin, before the idea of Providence, of human development, of the eternal indwelling spirit of truth and growth can be conceived in its own right. It was a great step to initiate, as Parker did, this movement of emancipation, to be the representative of the people in the mighty bursting of the bonds of centuries. The time has come for substituting the Universal, the Human in its

largest sense, for the provincialism of religions we are escaping: for covering our world-wide politics, trade and science, and their materialistic passions and desires with a religion intellectually and spiritually broad and deep and earnest enough to lift these to an ideal purpose. We stand now, in relation to this next step, amidst a popular indifference analogous to that from which Parker's great life was the waking trumpet-call. It is an indifference that will prove harder to break: it is protected by the sense of the all-sufficiency of negation, of emancipation from superstition, and the pleasure of using the old gloomy church—its names and symbols—in the spirit of new license for social gratification. But the day of enforcement to moral earnestness and ideal progress will come, and with it better understanding of such reform as Parker's, whose withdrawal bereaved every noble cause, whose work was destructive only as growth destroys. In a two-fold way he yet lives and labors with us, by a manhood whose record is forever valid for inspiration and rebuke, and by a written word, full, sincere and penetrative, one with American instinct and promise, every year wakening new thousands to trust the divinity within their souls.

America will honor her prophet, who, looking through the Red Sea he discovered in her

path, pointed to the rights and duties of her laboring men and women as the first matters for settlement on the shore beyond; who made his creed of God in Man mean the claim of every one of her children to freedom and opportunity; and who dared to set forth the characters she idolized, so that their good should live and teach, and their evil have no force to harm. His memory will mingle with all coming liberties, as a sublime religious and political resurrection is even to-day thrilling the air that breathes around his grave.

"The eternal step of Progress beats  
To that great anthem, calm and slow,  
Which God repeats!

"Take heart!—the Waster builds again—  
A charmed life old goodness hath;  
The tares may perish—but the grain  
Is not for death.

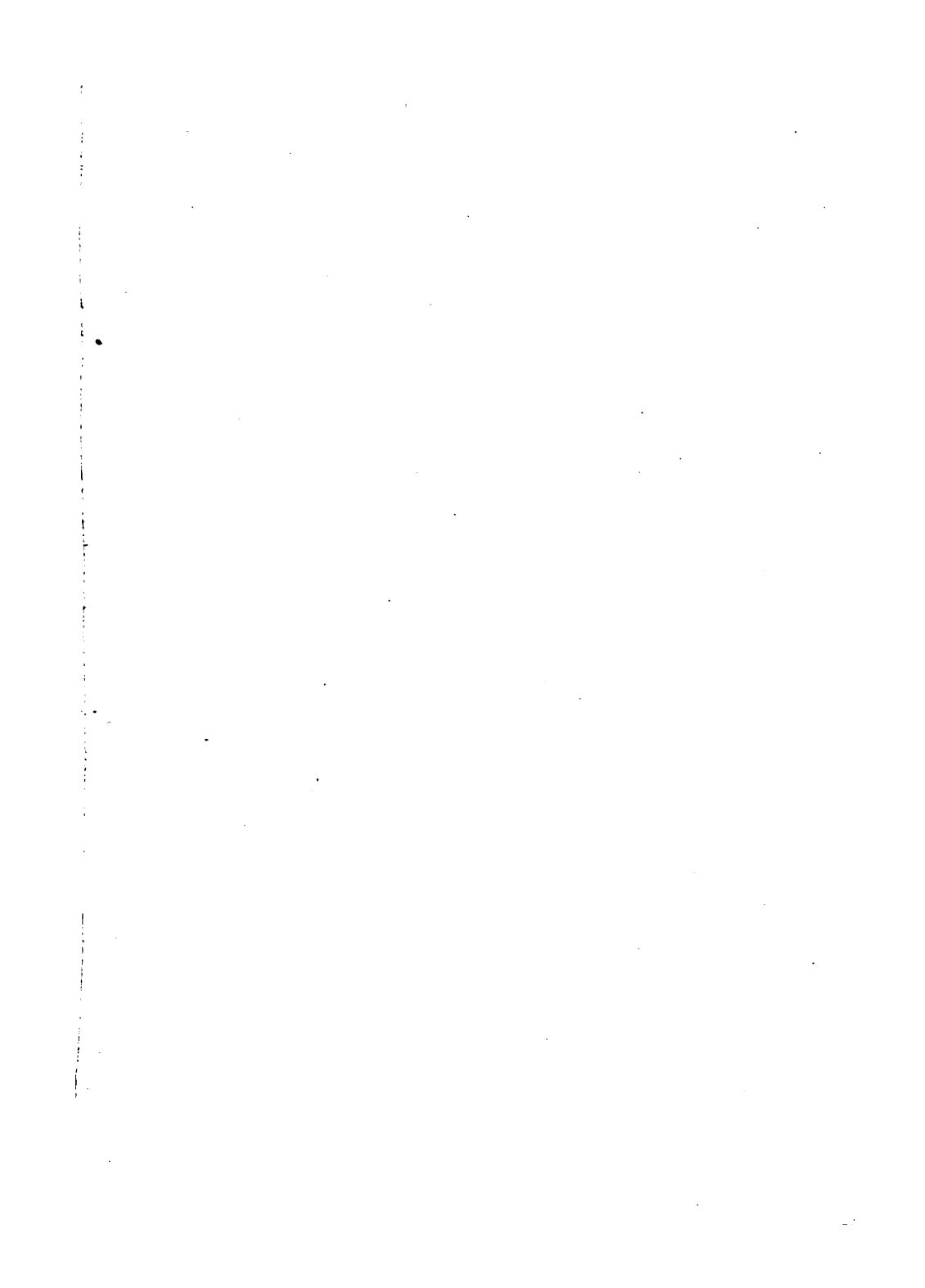
"God works in all things; all obey  
His first propulsion from the night:  
Ho, wake and watch!—the world is gray  
With morning light!"

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